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Public Opinion on Global Climate Change in Developed Countries: Five Case Studies

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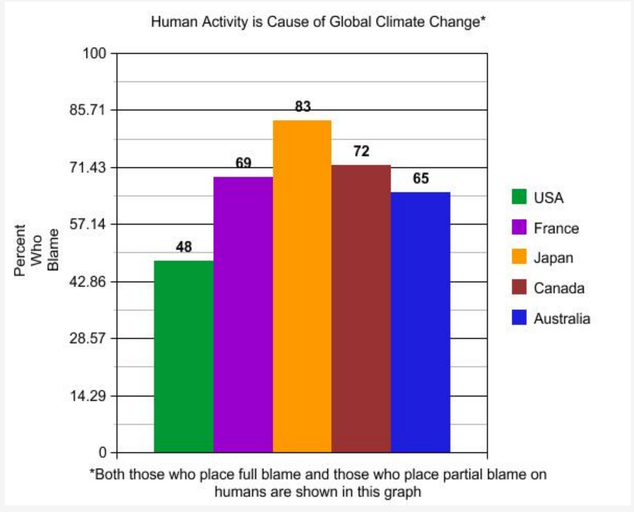
Introduction

This study examined five nations: the United States, Canada, Australia, France and Japan, and the opinions of their populations on the sources of global climate change and why these sources differ from country to country. For each of these countries, I examined wealth per capita, average education level, density of the population, and the perceived sources of climate change.

My original hypothesis of why developed countries would differ on their opinions of the causes of climate change had three points. I thought that the higher the wealth of a nation, the less its citizens would blame humans. The more education received, as measured by years taught in state school systems, the higher the blame placed on humans. Finally, the higher the density of population, the more likely a country would be to blame humans.



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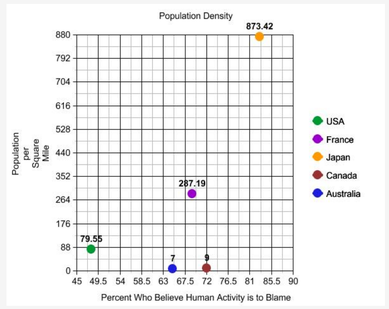
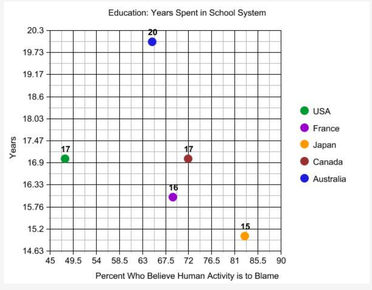
Results

My initial hypothesis that time spent in the education system might cause populations to report that human activity is the source of global climate change was not supported. A contrary relationship seems more likely given the data. With Canada being the exception, the more time spent in the school system in each case the *less* likely a person is to believe that climate change is caused by humans.
In the US 48% of the population believes that humans are the primary source of climate change. Putting aside Canada, the people of France and Japan continue this trend, with the amount of time spent in their school systems correlating with their level of belief that climate change is caused by human activity.

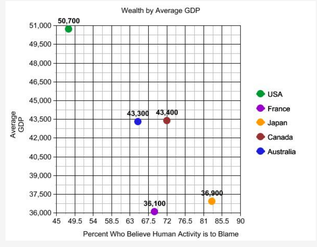




My hypothesis that population density had an effect on perception of climate change sources, namely that the higher the density in a country the more that country would place blame on humans for climate changes, had mixed support. In Japan, France and Australia I found a correlation between population density and the public view that humans are the cause of climate change. Each country had descending levels of population density and public awareness. However, the US had far fewer people place blame on human activity for the changes in the global climate than predicted, and Canada had more than predicted.

Results Continued

My hypothesis that the wealthier a nation is, the less likely its public will believe that the actions of humans are a main cause of climate change seemed to be consistent with the data. In the US, the wealthiest country in this study, only 48% of its population believed that humans contributed to climate change. Canada, the second wealthiest country, did not reflect this trend and is an outlier, as 72% of its population attributed climate change to humans. In order of wealth, Australia had 65%, Japan had 83%, and France had 69% of its population who believed that humans were somewhat to blame for climate change. It does seem that there is a correlation between the average GDP of a nation, and its likelihood in believing that human activity is the cause of global climate change.



Conclusions

The data seemed to agree with my hypothesis that the wealthier the nation the more they would blame humans. The data did not agree with my hypothesis on education and in fact the opposite was found to be more in line with the data. The data on population density does not seem to agree or disagree.

While the results of this study were inconclusive there does seem to be some correlation between belief in human causation in climate change and wealth in a nation. While the five case studies which I chose did not yield clear results one way or another, a larger sample might reveal further correlations between wealth and climate change belief. A wider study is needed to determine if there is a definitive correlation.

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